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## **Trump, Israel and what's driving activists opposed to the Iran conflict**

MIKE SUNNUCKS Adams MultiMedia

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Want to know how people feel about the U.S. war with Iran?

Ask them how they feel about President Donald Trump and American support for Israel.

Feelings about the war tend to parallel people's views about Trump.

The president's MAGA (Make America Great Again) base of supporters are the strongest proponents of the Iran war. Democrats opposed to Trump are the conflict's biggest detractors, according to public opinion polls.

But dig deeper and many war opponents on the front lines of the issue want the debate and discourse to move beyond contemporary dividing lines centered on Trump.

That's no easy task.

"I don't think it's just a Trump issue," said Dena Eakles, co-chair of the Wisconsin Network for Peace and Justice, a Madison-based coalition of progressive groups.

She sees bigger, broader issues stemming from the war, including environmental impacts as well as defense spending (which Trump has talked about taking to a record \$1.5 trillion).

"I do think we are in an evolutionary moment," Eakles said.

Pamela Minden, a Wisconsin-based activist for the Friends Committee on National Legislation (a pacifist Quaker group) also wants a broader focus on opposing wars and bloodshed beyond faultlines related to Trump.

"I think people work really hard not to let Trump be front and center," said Minden, who leads FCNL Wisconsin advocacy efforts. "That's his wish. That we will be distracted."

**SEEING GAZA IN IRAN** Many opposed to the war (from the progressive left and old-school pacifists to nativist populist right) want a reexamination and reset of the U.S. alliance with Israel.

They see connections between the Iran conflict and Israel's war in Gaza after Hamas' Oct. 7, 2023 attacks, and the civilian death toll among Palestinians amid the fighting and blockades.

"I think the real issue is for two years people saw dead children on their phones," said Danaka Katovich, national co-director for the CodePink antiwar group.

Katovich, who helps lead the group's efforts in Midwestern states, said frustrations with "endlessly funding Israel" take the antiwar efforts beyond reactions to Trump.

"I think it's bigger than that," she said.

CodePink is among the groups accusing Israel of a genocide or ethnic cleansing campaign in Gaza. That's a charge Israel vehemently disputes.

Hassan El-Tayyab, FCNL's legislative director for Middle East policy, also termed Israel's war in Gaza a genocide campaign and said Palestinians' face "apartheid" conditions.

He also sees connections to the Iran war.

El-Tayyab said the Gaza conflict “heightened” regional tensions and helped propel the new war in the hotspot region.

“It’s hard to see how this stops,” he said.

More than 77,000 people have been reported killed in the Gaza war (more than 75,000 Palestinians and 2,000 Israelis), according to numbers from the opposing sides.

**‘CRUSHED’** Israel has sought to avenge the Oct. 7 attacks by trying to decapitate Hamas in Gaza and Hezbollah in Lebanon (both Iranian proxies) and now the Islamist regime in Tehran. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has said the wars in Gaza and now Iran are about Israel’s survival.

Trump said the U.S. attacks aim to neuter Iran’s missile and naval capabilities as well its nuclear aspirations.

“President Trump is courageously protecting the United States from the deadly threat posed by the rogue Iranian regime — and that is as America First as it gets,” said White House spokesman Anna Kelly in a statement to Adams MultiMedia.

“The entire administration is working together to end Iran’s ability to possess a nuclear weapon, use or develop ballistic missiles, arm proxies, or use its now-defeated navy. The president has called attention to the Iranian regime’s threat prior to ever holding office, and his predecessors have talked about doing something for 47 years,” she continued.

Kelly said Trump “had the courage to finally do something about it, and Iran is being completely crushed under the weight of the United States military.”

**DISPARATE DIVISIONS** Support for the war is strongest among Trump supporters with 91% of the U.S. president's MAGA base approving of the president's handling of the issue, according to a poll by The Economist and survey firm YouGov.

That includes evangelical Christians who are among the strongest backers of Trump and U.S. support for Israel. War backers also point to the Iranian regime's recent crackdowns and killings of thousands of protesters and restrictive treatment of women.

Opponents of the war predominately sit on the Democratic and progressive left where Trump is unpopular, and where there is also increasing opposition to the U.S. alliance with Israel. Ninety-two percent of Democrats disapprove of Trump's decision to join Israel in attacking Iran Feb. 28, according to The Economist / YouGov survey.

A Gallup poll released the day before the war started Feb. 28 shows Democrats' sympathies sit more with the Palestinians than Israel.

The Gallup survey found 65% of Democrats side with the Palestinians over Israel. Republicans are just the opposite with 70% favoring Israel versus 13% for the Palestinians, according to the Gallup poll.

There are smatterings of populist conservatives — including some notable commentators — who have soured on Trump over the Iran war.

Some of them don't like U.S. support for Israel and another Middle East war on the heels of past interventions and occupations in Iraq and Afghanistan. Others want Trump to focus on domestic matters, in particular lowering high costs of living.

"That was not what they voted for," said John Peck, executive director of Family Farm Defenders, a Wisconsin-based progressive group said "They didn't vote for war."

**FOOD & FARMS**Peck notes that the U.S. military is the largest user of oil in the world and that the war's impediments to cargo flows are also impacting fertilizers.

The Middle East and Strait of Hormuz are key to the world's flow of fertilizers and their components. The war's disruption has sent prices skyward for farmers, including in the U.S.

"Farmers are worried," Peck said.

Eakles agrees.

"It's going to impact food all over the world," she said.

American Farm Bureau Federation President Zippy Duvall wrote Trump March 9 pressing for U.S. Naval escorts of cargo ships in the war zone, increased U.S. backed insurance coverage for shippers amid British maritime insurers curtailing trade flows, and an easing of U.S. tariffs related to fertilizers.

**GIVE PEACE A CHANCE**Along with the progressive and right-wing critics to the war are old-school pacifists (including Quakers and Mennonites) who are opposed to all wars.

"It doesn't have to be this way," Minden said.

She hopes for a paradigm shift when it comes to conflict resolution.

"We are seeing so much suffering. People are really deeply moved," Minden said.

"When you see 170 little girls were bombed to death, you cannot believe that war is right," she said, referring to the bombing of an all-girls school in southern Iran on Feb. 28, the first day of the war.

Iran blames the U.S. and Israel. Trump previously said the deadly blast, which is being investigated, may have been caused by Iranian friendly fire.

Reports from the Associated Press and New York Times say the bombing may have come from the U.S. citing preliminary findings pointing to faulty target intelligence.

The school is part of a Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps compound.

Trump says he started the war and launched attacks last year on Iran's nuclear bases to protect Israel, other Middle Eastern countries and the U.S. itself from potential attacks.

He said the focus is on "stopping an evil Empire, Iran, from having Nuclear Weapons, and destroying the Middle East and, indeed, the World."

"I won't ever let that happen," Trump said in a social media post March 12. He previously promised to rain "death, fire and fury" on the Iranian regime if they block global oil flows.

Minden hopes Trump and others in favor of wars have a change of heart

"I pray for him every single day," she said.

Still, much of the on-the-ground focus among opponents of the war centers on Trump.

El-Tayyab contends the U.S. and Israel war against Iran is "illegal, immoral and unjustified."

He wants Congress to assert its war powers under the U.S. Constitution and the War Powers Act. To date, the executive branch has been the sole governmental actor authorizing strikes.

El-Tayyab also wants to Congress to oppose an expected \$50 billion war supplemental request from Trump as well as his push to take overall U.S. defense spending from \$900 billion to \$1.5 trillion and reconsider measures aimed at restricting U.S. military aid for Israel.

“Diplomacy is the only way out of this,” he said.

El-Tayyab said FCNL is also organizing events with more liberal and pacifist Christian denominations in May to highlight Palestinian human rights.

That's in contrast to conservative Evangelical groups, such as Christians United for Israel, who back Trump and Israel.

**FORCE MULTIPLIER** According to Brown University, the U.S. spent an estimated \$34.8 billion on direct military aid to Israel or its own defense operations related to the Gaza war and helping Israel in its fight against Iran and its proxies.

That was before the new war.

The Trump administration estimates the new Iran war cost \$11.3 billion during its first week of combat.

The America Israel Political Action Committee (AIPAC), a lead pro-Israeli group in Washington, contends the war is a necessity and Israel is an essential and security and intelligence force multiplier for the U.S.

“For years, the Iranian regime has posed a grave threat to the United States, to Israel, and to the world. It has relentlessly pursued nuclear weapons, developed its ballistic-missile program, and funded terrorist organizations across the globe—all while brutalizing and killing its own people” the group said in a statement on the war.

**NO KINGS** Anti-war activists are planning to be at March 28 anti-Trump "No Kings" protests across the country.

Protests are scheduled for college towns such as Madison, Wisconsin, Athens, Ohio and Bozeman, Montana and big cities such as Washington D.C., Los Angeles, Minneapolis, New York and Seattle.

Anti-war advocates also want to increase outreach to smaller towns, labor unions (a traditionally key Democratic Party constituency) and blue-collar and service workers to engage against the war.

The latter could center on May 1 labor events.

"A lot of them voted for Trump," Peck said of working-class Americans.

But outreach to working class Americans has been problematic for progressives and Democrats with activists sometimes casting Israel, the U.S. and Trump as colonizers, patriarchal and white supremacists.

"We try to get out of our silos as much as possible," Katovich said of CodePink's efforts to engage on more conservative platforms such as X and its vocal disruptions of congressional hearings.

**DANGEROUS NARRATIVES** Critics of progressive and Democratic opponents of the war, and Trump's alliance with Netanyahu, say those stances can be rooted in an anti-Israel bias that can bleed into antisemitism.

"Since the start of hostilities with the Islamic Republic of Iran... we are witnessing an alarming pattern of escalating, inflammatory rhetoric from voices across the political and ideological spectrum. This rhetoric distorts reality and fuels dangerous antisemitic narratives," said Jonathan Greenblatt, CEO of the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) in a statement.

The Jewish group tracked a rise in anti-Israel and antisemitic incidents after Hamas' Oct. 7, 2023 attacks ignited the Gaza war.

The ADL argues the use of terms such as apartheid and genocide to describe Israel's actions is "inflammatory."

On March 12, shooters targeted a synagogue in Michigan as well as Old Dominion University in Virginia. One person was killed at ODU, along with the perpetrators of each incident.

According to reports, the Michigan shooter, identified as 41-year-old Ayman Mohamad Ghazali, had relatives Lebanon killed in a recent Israeli air strike.

The ODU shooter, identified as Mohamed Bailor Jalloh, 36, was previously convicted on a federal charge of supporting ISIS (the Islamic State), a U.S. designated terror group, according to reports.

Anti-war advocates stress they are against war.

"We're a peace organization. We are against war," Katovich said.

But the constant, frequently partisan, drumbeats surrounding Trump, Netanyahu and their wartime alliance can dominate the discourse.

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